

**Oral History Interview with  
Kenneth H. Hobbs**

**Cal Poly Pomona University Library**

## **Kenneth Hobbs Summary**

Kenneth Hobbs was a Professor of Plant and Soil Science in Cal Poly Pomona's School of Agriculture (later known as the Don B. Huntley School of Agriculture). He recounts his career, the expansion of the agriculture program, and his involvement with the Faculty Senate (later known as the Academic Senate). Hobbs was also an alumnus of the Voorhis School for Boys and he describes his school experience and memories of the school's founder and headmaster H. Jerry Voorhis. Voorhis was later elected to the House of Representatives and the Voorhis campus served as the earliest site of the college that would eventually become Cal Poly Pomona.

### **Subject Headings**

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona—Academic Senate

California State Polytechnic University, Pomona—Don B. Huntley College of Agriculture

Voorhis School for Boys

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# Kenneth Hobbs

1975

*Interview Conducted by Andrew Cabanguncan  
Transcribed by Iman Mirza*

**AC:** This interview concerns Professor Kenneth Hobbs, Professor of Plant and Soil Science at Cal Poly Pomona. The intended interview is to go into the facets of Cal Poly's history but also to show the human relationship between Mr. Hobbs, the faculty and the students. Mr. Hobbs, would you give a background of the earliest association you have had with the Voorhis campus?

**KH:** Yes, I attended San Dimas Grammar School until I completed my grammar school education and from there, went to the junior high, which was then known as the Voorhis School for Boys, where of course Jerry Voorhis functioned as headmaster. I went through the regular high school curriculum and immensely enjoyed my association with Jerry, who had a great influence on my life. I thoroughly enjoyed my three years at Voorhis; I didn't get much into the way of sports there, however, because I had to walk five miles home or take the bus right after school. So that cut me out of the athletic program, although perhaps I would've liked to get into that. Even though in the Government courses and things related that I took from Jerry, I enjoyed it immensely and I felt that he was a phenomenally fine counselor and general headmaster for the school.

**AC:** Mr. Hobbs, likewise, what was your earliest contact with the Cal Poly campus?

**KH:** I was at Oregon State, finishing up my Master's degree, and getting well into the curriculum for my PhD when I began to hear about Cal Poly, particularly San Luis Obispo, and I guess there was some vague reference to Cal Poly San Dimas. It didn't really strike me that they were using the Voorhis campus at that time. When I completed my work at Oregon State, I began to send out; letters of request for information about teaching openings and discovered that there was a possible opening in the future at Cal Poly San Dimas. In fact, at the time, I told my wife out of the some 50 letters that I sent out, it would be interesting if the only opening that I found was at Cal Poly in San Dimas. It turned out to be one of three openings. I then, of course, made my appearance on campus to let them know there that I was available for a position.

**AC:** Was the Dean of the school responsible for hiring you?

**KH:** Yes, he was. He was Dean [Harold] Wilson, of course. I started working with the L.A. County Agricultural Commissioners' Office as an agricultural inspector. In order to develop the field experience required for beekeeping and a number of other courses that I have taught since I have been here at Cal Poly, I suddenly heard about two years after I started working for the Commissioners' office as well as for the state of California in nursery service to learn plant identification that the opening had occurred. So, I presented myself to the Dean the afternoon that I had heard this, and I was hired on the spot.

**AC:** What was your original assignment at the school?

**KH:** Well, I think my original assignment was quite interesting. I began to take courses that Eddie Appel was handling and several new courses that were necessary to add to the curriculum for the Agricultural Inspector. I then began immediately to teach beekeeping and handled the laboratory in weed control, as well as the laboratory in some of the fruit and vegetables courses that Mr. Appel was getting going. Along with insect biology, which was a non-degree course at the time, we had of course a technical curriculum as well as a degree curriculum. The insect biology was for the non-degree participants.

**AC:** What contact did you have with Dean Wilson over the years?

**KH:** I had very little contact with him, except he was the dean, of course, that hired me. I simply went about my work and had not too much occasion to deal directly with Dean Wilson. And of course, it wasn't too long after I got there before Dean Wilson went to the San Luis Obispo campus and most of my contact then was with Dean [J. Cordner] Gibson.

**AC:** What contact did you have with Dean [Chester] McCorkle over the years?

**KH:** I had quite a bit of contact with Dean McCorkle. He was my original contact and of course, he was at San Luis Obispo when I first came down. I sent a letter plus all my documents to him to indicate my availability. Later, he was, of course, Dean of the Pomona campus and he sat on my executive committee when I was Senate chairman. So, I had the occasion to become very well-acquainted with Dean McCorkle, at least in that capacity.

**AC:** Can you provide us insight into the School of Agriculture?

**KH:** Well, I don't know whether I can give you insight into the School of Agriculture that is necessarily valid. If one looks at statistics in the references, one finds that the school of agriculture or the schools of agriculture throughout the nation tend to be highly conservative. In fact, they are by far the most conservative of all of the teaching groups; that is, if you start with Philosophy at the other end, they tend to be the most liberal, with Agriculture very near the bottom as the lists are arranged in relation to conservatism. And this School of Agriculture here is no exception. I tend to feel that the school of agriculture... [PAUSE]. Many of the people in the School of Agriculture tend to resist change, perhaps more strongly than other people. This is in part of why I have gotten into the faculty politics as I have through the years here at Cal Poly, was to kind of help spur the School of Agriculture into action, to help them develop the strength necessary to obtain the things that they need to do a good job in their teaching.

**AC:** What has been your relationship with your Deans over the years?

**KH:** What little or was of my relationship with Dean Wilson was very good. My relationship with Dean Gibson was also very good because I felt that they were both very fair, that they were both very directly concerned with the teacher and his needs to do a good job for the students. As time has worn on, this has disappeared from Cal Poly. The Deans at the present time, let's say the Deans generally in the college are more concerned with the administrative structure than they

are with the individual teacher and his need, his ability to acquire the things that he has to have to do a good job for his students.

I have tended to stay away from Deans wherever I could. My relationship with Dean [Carl] England, under whose [inaudible] you might say that I worked for most of my time here, I believe was very good. I felt that Carl England was a very effective public-relations individual. I felt that his strength in that area were certainly very prominent. I believe he could've probably worked to fight for the School of Agriculture with the administration more diligently. But if he had done so, he'd probably would not have remained as a Dean for a very great length of time.

**AC:** Has the School of Agriculture changed much in the period of your tenure?

**KH:** Yes, it's changed a little. Certainly, in the relation to the general teaching approach, "Learning while doing," or whatever the expression was—it's been so long since I've heard the thing now, it's even confused my mind—but earning while learning in the upside down system was, I think, very effective in our early years. Although I believe the quality of our own students in Agricultural Biology have not diminished. I believe the overall School of Agriculture has changed to conform more to the change which has taken place university-wide.

It's become less personal and less directly involved with student needs, and when I say "student needs" I'm referring primarily to their needs in their chosen vocational field. We tend to get more liberal arts or more highly scientific, but certainly not as practical as the School of Agriculture was at first. It's interesting, and we may get to it later, that you mention my tenure. We worked 11 years here before we gained tenure at all, and then President [Julian] McPhee announced that his board had worked very hard to give us four-year appointments. All during this time, all other state colleges had the tenure program.

**AC:** Mr. Hobbs, in your estimation, what individuals or group of individuals had an outstanding influence in the course of events in decision-making as the school began to grow rapidly during the '50s and '60s?

**KH:** Well of course, President McPhee was at the helm of Cal Poly and his efforts were, I think, I don't believe anyone could've done a better job than he did since at least in the structure that he had developed. Cal Poly got all of its funds from the [inaudible] from horse [inaudible] for many, many years. President McPhee served as his own legislative advocate, as his own [PAUSE]  
**KH:** Well, the term escapes me. He would go to Congress and the state legislature and get what he wanted directly, and he had to work very hard to do that. So, the decisions that were made, of course, were made by President McPhee himself. He tended to work rather diligently at developing committees to help him with his decisions, however frequently his decisions were already made before committees were formed, which did tend to make some rather difficult situations at times with the faculty.

The '50s and '60s of course, must be divided at 1965 when President McPhee stepped down and President [Robert C.] Kramer stepped in his place. At that point, I believe things began to change and I don't believe that they were for the better. I believe we began to lose our rather nice contact with the practical approach that we were taking here at Cal Poly. On the other hand, the energies

and efforts of the faculty began to increase and began to support, rather strongly, a Faculty Senate rather than a College Council, as we developed in the first few years of the major changes that took place as a result of a master plan for the California State colleges at the time. Faculty became very involved very strongly and we were finally able to separate the College Council into Staff Council and Faculty Council, which was later made into a Faculty Senate.

**AC:** In your estimation, what individuals or group of individuals influenced the school as it achieved university status?

**KH:** Well, I think I would have to give credit both to the administration and to the faculty, and as the university began to increase its size of the college then, it also began to increase its diversity and it spread into other areas; we developed new schools and new departments, and I believe this was, quite strongly, aligned with administrative awareness that demonstrated that the expansion of the college had to go along with the more or less natural function of the background of the faculty that the college acquired over a period of time. It was obvious that the faculty began to diversify and that it was a natural, more or less natural, process of growth which took us into a rather broad range of fields and gave us a final analysis of university status.

**AC:** Reflecting back, what was your contact with President McPhee?

**KH:** In the early years, of course I rarely saw him. Until 1960, I did not get in at all into faculty politics. I saw him only when he spoke to the faculty and to other groups, or when he visited the campus from San Luis Obispo. *After I became... well let's see*—going back earlier, yes right I would just have to say that my contact with him was rather minimal until the master plan for the California State colleges was developed. I began in 1960 to get into faculty politics and I had a much greater contact with President McPhee. As Senate Vice Chairman and as Senate Chairman, I had a number of conferences with him. I would have to say that we were somewhat diametrically opposed in our approach and that my concern was for functioning as an exponent of the Faculty Senate rather than as an exponent of the administration, which has always been my approach.

**AC:** Did you find great utility for President McPhee's philosophy of education or was it a burden?

**KH:** I would have to say it was distinctly not a burden. I liked the philosophy tremendously; I feel that his announcement to us one day that Cal Poly was preparing 15% of the individuals for 85% of the openings, and that the University of California was preparing 85% of the students for 15% of the openings was certainly an eye-opener. I supported them very strongly—this philosophy of practical education. I believe that over the years, our students in running circles around with the graduates from the Cal [University of California] system, that this is good evidence that the background provided at Cal Poly based upon President McPhee's philosophy was just excellent and it's that philosophy that I believe we've lost, along with the friendliness the staff and faculty and everybody enjoys, or used to enjoy at least with the administration.

**AC:** What has been your contact with President Kramer?



**KH:** *I was chairman of the committee to elect or to—pardon me recommend the... .* I was chairman of the Presidential Selection Committee. In that process, I had an opportunity to talk with President Kramer in his interview for the job as President. I had previously met him and was astonished at his memory, and his facility with which he could call names and mention small items and individuals' personal background. This showed to me a rather prominent and phenomenal memory; I was very impressed by it. From that time on, I've met with President Kramer as he came to our department in the School of Agriculture to ask about how things were going in those days when we were considerably smaller, back in the '60s.

He had intended to get around and see a number of people. More recently, however, I have had very little or no contact with him because I have slowly dropped out of faculty politics, except as the faculty union president. *In that process or—* in that capacity, I had very little contact with President Kramer. And from that time forward, say in the very late '60s until today, my meetings with him have only been very casual.

**AC:** Please describe your service in the Faculty Senate.

**KH:** I commenced in 1960 or '61 whenever the Faculty Council started under Dean [Albert] Aschenbrenner, who was then chairman of the senate. I served as his Vice Chairman for two years and then went on as Senate Chairman in 1963-1964 year, I guess, or '64-'65 I'm not certain; I don't really recall too well at this point. We developed a brand-new faculty constitution and bylaws. I recall very distinctly having to—on the occasion when we were to pass that constitution, having to get several people on several phones in the Music building. Even to get a quorum there to vote on that document, we worked long and hard to prepare it, to get it ready so that it had some teeth in it; so that the Faculty Senate would have at least some input into the administrative processes whereby we could perhaps terminate the need to have committee meetings after committee meetings deciding on issues that had already been determined by the administration, which tended to be again very, very frustrating for the members of the faculty.

**AC:** Do you serve on any Search and Seizure committees?

**KH:** No, in fact, I can't even say I know anything about the Search and Seizure committee at all. I was not involved there.

**AC:** What outstanding committee assignments did you have during your tenure?

**KH:** Well, of course, the one I have already mentioned as Chairman of the committee for the selection of the President, or for the recommendation of the President to the Chancellor's Office. I enjoyed, for a number of years, serving on the Faculty Policies Committee. Until the 1972-73 year when I was a member of the Faculty Policies Committee, I suddenly became aware that I was putting in 98% effort in getting maybe 1.2% return. I discovered that as a philosophical process in my own nature and I sat down and prepared a letter of resignation from that committee and indicated to them that I wish to resign and my reason for resigning was because I did not like the activity of sitting in on committees any longer. And so, that was my last volunteering process for Faculty Senate processes.

**AC:** In your opinion, what were the most important programs initiated at Cal Poly over the years, the Agricultural department of the school and the university as a whole?

**KH:** Well, that's kind of difficult for me to answer because there's been so many changes in the university. The expansion of the School of Agriculture has been important, but I don't believe it has necessarily been tremendously beneficial. I believe, certainly, as an important program, as such, the Vocational Agriculture program that we have developed in the past number of years has been an extremely important adjunct, primarily because it gives our students a better opportunity from all agricultural departments to go on into teaching high school people in Vocational Agriculture, which is an extremely important area to involve young people because agriculture will become more and more important over the period of years and years to come.

This Vocational Agricultural process is an extremely important thing to help young people in the state, to understand the importance of agriculture as a field, and in relation to the development of food and fiber for the needs of the people of the world. Our own program, of course, I must point to in developing [inaudible] changing it whenever it was needed; adding and subtracting, when appropriate; dividing into options as programs in the industrial field, in the areas that we serve has helped a great deal in keeping our students abreast and providing them with an opportunity to get into the developing field, where we've had anywhere up to say 10 openings for every graduate that we put out. We still enjoy, at least, more openings than we have graduates.

In relation to the university as a whole, the general expansion of the co-curricular activities in the areas of Drama and Art have added a certain cultural factor which was not here in 1950, when I arrived. I believe that college is a very important tool for helping students to realize, not only a vocational need, but a cultural need as well. Certainly, adding those extracurricular programs, which have now become full-fledged departments, has been a very important cultural aspect for Cal Poly.

**AC:** Has the agricultural school grown the way it should have in direction of programs?

**KH:** Yes, I would tend to say that it had grown the way it should have, with the exception of the Animal Science department. I do not support the Animal Science department in its present size because I believe that most of the students have difficulty in finding positions once they graduate. Of course, I realize also that we have a very strong pre-vet program, but it leads the student to his veterinary degree in other states if he's going to get a veterinary background. It's just near impossible here and I, therefore, do not support the size of that particular program. I believe that high school students should be told that finishing animals is a very excellent way of getting into an activity; that you can watch, that you can enjoy, that you can watch an animal develop that's yours, take the animal to shows; we got first place ribbons. This is an extremely good factor in providing a student with success. And certainly, success is a strong motivating factor, but I believe that the counselors in the Animal Science area are amiss in not telling students that this is an example of an activity in the field of agriculture that they can get into. It's very simple and very easy to administer animal programs in these high schools. It is not easy to administer an entomology program or a process which would lead them to understand something about, say, invertebrate animals where there are so many openings.

It's fairly easy to work up an Ornamental Horticulture program in the high school, and that has enhanced our ornamental horticulture program here. It's kept them supplied with any number of students; the opportunity for Ornamental Horticulture students is a lot stronger than it is for animal science students. We frequently, in Agricultural Biology, get Animal Science students coming back to take additional work in Agricultural Law and Entomology and a number of other areas in order to get a job as an agricultural biologist, or as we used to call them, agricultural inspector.

**AC:** Have you had the financial support and the allocation of physicians to carry out your responsibilities?

**KH:** I'd say, by and large, yes I have. As an individual, I believe the individuals in the School of Agriculture have had financial support and the allocations of physicians to meet our responsibilities. There are some areas that I think need discussion; we've gotten... new buildings and we've been able to move from one area to another and we've ended up with a nice agricultural building. However, if a person tries to make changes as changes are seen to be made, then more financial support is needed. And if the curriculum is expanding, certainly there is a need for expanding the number of physicians and providing more teachers.

I believe the student-teacher ratio has been splendid. However, as we have increased our size, we have also found it necessary to carry excessive loads; in order to let students simply get the courses that they need. Doing this, this was our fault. It's really not required that we carry excessive loads but for years, we did this and we should not have done so. We had simply pulled our number of courses and so forth in various related departments and had demanded that we get additional people. We perhaps could've done so and it would've reduced our load to say, at least a normal load. And I have not carried nearly as large a load as people have in a number of other departments.

Financial support is needed in some areas. Let's say if I were to continue teaching here, I would want an opportunity to develop physical arrangements whereby I could teach learning through discussion, personalized system of instruction, audio tutorial system and molecular method all in proper or happy combination. I don't believe that with our present, physical facilities, however, that we could set up an audio tutorial lab and still have the proper laboratory space for students to come and simply commence their learning units; before they would go to, say, booths or other areas for the audio tutorial system as well as the personalized system of instruction using advanced and better students to help the students taking courses' introductory courses in the programs.

**AC:** How has the overall growth of the university influenced the growth of the School of Agriculture? Positively or negatively?

**KH:** I'd have to say negatively. *I can remember the way it was*—I don't necessarily feel that the way it was ideal. Although the way it was so far as our more functional and more natural field of approach to teaching students what they were going to face when they get out and our efforts to broaden as well as deepen our course approach, our specific subject course approach was extremely important in this time yet alone. I believe that the overall development of the

university has changed this tremendously from what it was, whatever that might've been described as, to one of a much more liberal arts process.

The PhD is somehow revered and pointed with far too much pride and is used as a tool for recruitment or a requirement for recruitment. I believe that has created more disaster than any single thing that has ever happened here at this university. People with tremendous backgrounds, field experience, and so forth can do a much better job normally than most PhDs. There are PhDs who can gain experience and awareness just as well as others, but too many people with PhDs are blinded by their experience in gaining that degree and they don't feel like they can be touched.

*So many of them are ignorant of*—And when I say “ignorant” I don't mean stupid, I mean ignorant. They use the degree to hide behind and never learn anything more. Therefore, too many people with a PhD are asked if they wanna teach, not can they teach. Or do they have a real desire to teach because they have something that they feel they can give the students. They set up ivory towers and no one can get in. Too many people feel they shouldn't even be associating with others [who don't have] PhDs.

**AC:** Dr. Hobbs, what is a future for higher education?

**KH:** Well, I see a lot of things happening that would indicate to me that many of our campuses, University of California, as well as the state university and college system is doomed to campuses which will be more or less abandoned. It will become white elephants; the libraries will be the only important element of the colleges and universities as they now exist as simple information retrieval sources. [Inaudible] I believe, will become more and more important as a source of information; as a source of education for students, I do not see them continuing lecture method as a technique for any satisfactory kind of educational process.

I think the lecture method is the most barbaric, and when I say barbaric I mean lack of understanding or feeling for what's happening. Many teachers, to me, just simply do not understand the changing of notes from the teachers' notebook to the student notebook is a happy experience for anybody. If what the teacher says is that important, they should put it in print and hand it to the student and tell them to take it home and study it. They certainly shouldn't stand there and talk for an hour while the student gets writer's cramp and does not listen. He cannot listen when he's taking notes, he can only be taking notes.

Of course, the student worries as to whether he's gotten all the notes down, or they got them in the right form and every bit of information that is essential to the course, and he ends up with nothing but headaches, pressure and the rest of it. I think that other forms of education are going to be much more valid in the years to come. Higher education now will not even be recognized, let's say, in 10 years.

**AC:** In referring to the university, what mistakes has the school made in growing?

**KH:** Well, I think the school has ignored the basic premise of education. It has grown too fast; it has grown into areas where the individuals who have come in, have felt they should grow in,

rather than to try to maintain any kind of direction. One of the strongest mistakes that we have made is the lack of the development of a format, or a policy, or an objective. The stated objectives have become much more, shall we say, blurred with the Master Plan in the supposedly new approach to higher education where we have masses and masses of young people wanting higher education.

I believe that our answers have been to try to grow, to keep pace with it, and in so doing, we've lost out a great deal on the quality of the educational process the student has gained in comparison to what the quality was, let's say earlier. I believe that students now have to learn a great deal more than they did in my early days of teaching, but I don't believe that the information is imparted in quite the same way or with quite the same quality, nor with any kind of firm objective.

**AC:** What is your attitude toward the censure of President Kramer?

**KH:** Well, my attitude is this: President Kramer, in his position as president, couldn't very well do anything else. If he had done anything else, the Chancellor's Office would've gotten angry with him; his own administrators would've gotten angry with him. The faculty is deluding itself in assuming that the President is going to give power. He will not give power; if he does, he's a fool. He's going to continue to censure and continue to maintain, with an iron grip, his own administrative power and structure. The faculty does not realize, still, that in order to assume strength or power, they simply have to assume it. They have to arrogate their rights and take what strength and power that they need to administer their own processes. I feel that the administration, not only this one, but every administrative structure with whatever government level in whatever college or university, private or public, that most administrative structures have developed as an entity unto themselves.

And in doing so, they lose sight completely of their original purpose and that was to help those that decided that it would be a good idea to have administrative structure to do a good job. I believe a president or any administration should go to their superiors and demand, fight for urgently, the things that the instructor needs to do a good job.; that is obviously the purpose and therefore this century right now is a simple process of continued censure and the maintenance of strength and power that any administrative structure must have. The [Faculty] Senate simply has to, along with the rest of the faculty, determine that if they want to be responsible for and able to respond to the challenges that face them, they are simply going to have to arrogate their rights.

**AC:** Dr. Hobbs, I want to thank you for giving your time to let me hear you, and I have learned a great bit just listening to you and the insight that you have on Cal Poly campus and some personnel that have been here. Again, I wish to thank you.

**KH:** My pleasure.

*End of interview*

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